



Tom Harrison in two very different and typical occupations: above (working on pedestal at right), with the excavation team at work in the West Mouth of Niah Cave, Sarawak, and below in the Santubong Bungalow (center) explaining excavated artifacts from one of the Santubong iron smelting sites to a visiting audience. Photographs courtesy of the Sarawak Museum.

Tom Harrisson and the Uplands:

A SUMMARY OF HIS UNPUBLISHED ETHNOGRAPHIC PAPERS

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WHEN TOM HARRISSON died in Thailand during 1976, he had experienced close to ten years of his "retirement." He had lived and worked in the United States and in Europe. True to the life-style he had assumed as a civil servant and museum curator earlier on, in Sarawak, he had studied his environment and had written about it. But his old fascination with Borneo had also remained. When he had travelled there during these past ten years, it was to refresh memories and to enjoy the company of old friends. However, he also intensified his old research interests in the land and among the peoples he knew so well.

Particularly that part of his work which one might call anthropological and ethnographic in orientation had gained a fresh topicality in the present. Tom had preserved large quantities of records which he had never used in his serious writing. He had intended to work on these and to publish as time and opportunity arose. But since only little progress had become apparent at the time of his death, questions were asked of me regarding the whereabouts of these papers. I became involved with tracing them and can now elucidate in some detail.

HISTORY AND MOVEMENT OF UNPUBLISHED STUDIES

The papers consist of original field-notes, maps and photographs, tapes, digests of notes, draft analyses, ideas for research, memoranda, and correspondence on and about native peoples in Borneo's interior. One segment addresses situations which Tom encountered in their company between 1945 and 1967. Another deals with his concerns from 1967, the year of his retirement, onward until the time of his death.

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The earlier papers are fairly extensive and specialized in content. They are also more important than the sequels which accumulated during Tom's visits to Borneo, or as parts of his support of colleagues and students who had field interests there. These supports frequently served as sequels to his own earlier concerns and emphasize processes of change in the native societies observed.

Tom used to assemble papers and files in accordance with his particular subject interest. But because he worked in diverse subjects and across disciplines as well, and because he was extensively mobile and worked without secretarial help until the mid 1950s, he was accustomed to keeping his own track in a very informal and personal fashion. When I started to assist him in 1954, he taught me as much of this background as he thought I must have. But I gained insight and competence in the diversity of his references only after sharing them with him over some years. I was, however, least familiar with his anthropological and ethnographic concerns, particularly as they specialized on the interior. I did not travel there until the late 1950s, and then only briefly. He shared that part of his work more closely with his senior museum staff and expatriate colleagues.

As we prepared to leave Borneo during 1967, we committed parts of all our unpublished research records to an archive in the curator's office of the Sarawak Museum. There were, for instance, papers with archaeological references that could not be promoted into publication without the excavated materials to which they referred. Elsewhere I have summarized the content of the unpublished archaeological references (B. Harrison 1977). There were others, including some with a bearing on anthropology, ethnography, and related interests. Nearly all of these had Tom intimately linked with a colleague or co-author in joint research. (The individuals who worked in close association with Tom have produced their own accounts in journal issues dedicated to his memory. Volume 50, number 1 of *JMBRAS* [June 1977] and the present issue of *AP* are examples. Other statements are contained in 1976 and 1977 editions of the *Borneo Research Bulletin* [Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia].) Since we intended to return to Borneo for periods of study and writing, and the interests of staff and colleagues were at stake, it was only logical that such papers should be centralized in Kuching.

But Tom preferred to take his upland papers along with him to the United States. They concerned mainly him, and they were important. They could not be duplicated mechanically. Only he could make reasonable use of them, and follow-up in university libraries was needed. He also believed that the material was sensitive and perhaps likely to invite abuse.

Intending the promotion of publications, Tom maintained these papers in the United States between 1967 and 1971, the period he resided at Cornell University as a Senior Research Associate of the Southeast Asia Program. He used them to some extent: in graduate teaching, in advising colleagues and students who consulted him with their field interests. But when Tom and I separated in 1971, the major portion of these papers had remained unused.

As Tom moved his residence to Brussels, he took parts of the papers with him, leaving others in my care. When I, too, moved on from Ithaca during 1974, that part which I had stored had to be relocated once again. James Rousseau was then engaged in the production of a special issue on the peoples of Central Borneo for

the *Sarawak Museum Journal* (Rousseau and Chin 1974). In correspondence with Tom and many of his former informants, students, and colleagues, he agreed to give Tom's papers a home and to make them available at the Department of Anthropology at McGill University, Montreal, to scholars with Bornean interests. Acting on Tom's instructions, I transferred these papers and associated ethnographic specimens into the care of James Rousseau.

That other body of his papers which Tom had earlier taken to Brussels was out of my sight until after his death. Tan Sri Datuk Mubin Sheppard, one of Tom's oldest friends, recovered what had remained then. Anxious to preserve any unpublished research papers that Tom might have had, he had obtained clearance from Tom's family and trustees to review Tom's files in Brussels, and to collect papers which had references to Southeast Asia for preservation in the Malaysian National Archives of Kuala Lumpur. I was granted an opportunity to review the material after it had been placed into the Archives.

The details which follow refer to what I can recall of Tom's interests in these papers, and to the notes which I took while handling the materials which are now located in Kuala Lumpur and in Montreal.

BACKGROUND AND CHARACTER OF UNPUBLISHED STUDIES

The time which Tom covered by studies in the uplands, the events which prompted his long-term residence in Sarawak, the different roles he assumed while in communication with the native peoples he studied, and his evocative style of recording combine to give these papers a unique flavor. He started to observe during 1945, as a soldier and guerilla leader. After the Japanese occupation had ended and he was demobilized, he remained in Sarawak as a civil servant. It was part of his duty then to promote the welfare of ethnic minorities, to gain knowledge about them, and to assist their development.

Propelled by the relative freedom from restraint which the late flowering of British colonialism was able to support in Sarawak, he travelled extensively in the uplands. When his growing museum placed larger demands on his time in the capital close to the coast, he promoted associate field studies through members of his staff and expatriate colleagues. When the Brunei Rebellion broke in late 1962, his old military interest revived. He became cloak-and-dagger man to the British forces, assisting military operations along sensitive border areas, supported by old, upland friends. After Sarawak assumed political independence, he resumed his post as Museum Curator and Government Ethnologist, now serving new policies of ethnic integration and ideals of a modern, national culture. He retired from his service, hoping to return for research and writing. But such visits as he was able to make were brief, based not in Sarawak, but in Brunei, where he was advisor to H.M. the Sultan in museum affairs.

His familiarity with the land and the peoples of the uplands had turned into a personal liability. Expatriate presence there was unwelcome. Military, missionary, and political drives had reduced the coherence of the interior since Tom first became involved. So long as they had been relatively isolated, the Kenyahs, Kayans, and Kelabits of the interior were reflected in Tom's papers as a united, dynamic force. But the force became diluted as government reestablished com-

munications and assisted missionary and development schemes. Civilian movements across the borders atrophied during the years of confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia which followed. Political and economic divisions between once united groups of peoples resulted.

The Kenyahs, Kayans, and Kelabits now began to orient themselves more intensively toward the coast. Measured against the powerful Iban Dayak and the combined Malay-Melanau segments of the Sarawak population, however, they were relatively weak. But as insecurity in their interior uplands persisted even after "Confrontation" had ended, fresh opportunities arose for the peoples of the border. They were able to gain from various defense projects which brought military spending there.

Tom's papers relate to these areas and to the rapid changes which occurred in them. His focus concentrates on the Kelabits. He spent as many as four years in the village of Bario, spreading his sojourns over two decades. He observed the community as it grew from a few hundred persons in one longhouse to a clustered, border town with a busy airport, tourism, imported religions, educational, medical, and military services, and cooperative industrial enterprise as well. "I have a special fondness for 'Bario'," he wrote during "Confrontation" when these changes were initiated, "not only as an anthropologist in a remarkably remote human place, but equally because by chance, it was within a mile of this salt-rich, buffalo-happy, wet-padi human place that I landed (upon my backside) by parachute in 1945." The quotation is from a little-known text which he wrote for the Director of Operations in Borneo during the Brunei Rebellion of 1962, Major-General W. C. Walker (T. Harrisson 1962: 16).

SPECIFIC CONTENT OF UNPUBLISHED STUDIES

The original Kelabit diaries which Tom had started then are now in the Malaysian Archives. They are difficult material to decipher. When Tom first kept them, paper was rare. Portage in and out of the interior was laborious and expensive. His writing, mostly in pencil, is therefore crowded, and is contained mostly in pocket-sized notebooks, many of them tattered and affected by mold. His first entries date to February 1945. They are accompanied by a slim pamphlet, printed in Japan for Japanese soldiers, one of the few trophies he captured in Bario.

These Kelabit papers are perhaps the most important part of Tom's unpublished work. As a related body of papers on the Kenyah and Kayan groups of peoples, they incorporate three areas of concern: field diaries, notes taken during the pursuit of special subjects or events, and reports initiated through informants or associates.

Field Diaries

The field diaries cover journeys into and out of the Kelabit uplands, and sorties across the borders to Kalimantan. They are essential background for the support of papers which refer to special subjects, for the reconstruction of Tom's chronology, and for an interpretation of the body of illustrations which accompanies them.

The Limbang and Lawas districts feature between March 1945 and June 1946. The upper Baram River, the routes into Kelabit and Murut country, and the borders

with Kalimantan feature between November 1947 and July 1948. The same areas are described during December 1949, and again a decade later, in December 1959. Tom took trips from Bario "down the Libban" and under the Tamabo range of mountains then.

Other diaries were kept by Tom while he stayed in the village of Bario. They are important evidence during much of 1946, between December 1947 and April 1948, and again in November 1959. Apparently no diaries were preserved which relate to Tom's April 1961 and September 1962 visits. He was keeping track of all his movements in clothbound, one-page-a-day diaries by that time. All these had moved with us to the United States, but apparently did not survive in Brussels.

Records of Special Studies

Special records of studies which Tom pursued in Kelabit country are most important among this material. All these are now located in Kuala Lumpur. A prominent, early focus was agriculture. Tom's emphases were on wet rice, bunding, and husbandry of water, seasonal activities observed during 1946, 1947, 1948, and 1949. These are amplified by statistics taken three years later, and draft analyses, typed, for use in publication. Related to agriculture are bird notes which deal with the species upland peoples customarily observed for the correct timing of their farming and associated social events.

Inventories of populations in upland villages and the material possessions of uplanders in them are another prominent concern. The villages of Bario, Pa Main, Pa Kelalan, Pa Bangor, and Pa Trap feature in this subject area during 1948 and 1949. The first two of the above, and Pa Umor and Pa Ra in addition, feature a decade later, during 1959. The Kelabit language and grammar was an issue only once, during 1947.

The question of language probably arose at this time in connection with some other records the subject of which was oral tradition. These appear to be incomplete. There are notes on native memories of headhunting, in a volume captioned "heads." The partial account of an Irau burial feast, which Tom was able to observe in Bario, is in the same area of interest. All these uncertainly date between 1947 and 1949. Additions on adat and religion were made during 1959.

Other subjects which Tom pursued in Kelabit villages include the food cooked, hygiene, character, humor, games and play of peoples; the making of canoes and of poison during hunting expeditions; the trade and indebtedness between Kelabits and their neighbors, from 1947 onward.

Tom's 1959 visit to the uplands seems to have been timed after an interval of seven years. Notebooks recording the phenomenon of change exist for 1945, 1949, and 1952. The interest in change is prominently reintroduced in 1959 and is followed up in 1961 and 1962, to a time just before the Brunei Rebellion. All these notes can probably be referred to as a series.

Tom's own method of working, and the subject matters of his interest, had undergone change during the late 1950s. He was anxious to recover as much scientific and specific evidence as was possible. He was keen to pursue archaeological and zoological investigations. He liked to involve colleagues and assistants, and to fly in and out for brief periods of work. This change was partly prompted by his

budget. His votes for anthropological and ethnographic pursuits had increased only slightly. More substantial financial support had become available for archaeological and zoological investigations.

His interest in the megaliths of the uplands was particularly strong. Eight notebooks dating to November 1959 refer to archaeological explorations and megaliths close to Pa Ra and the Tomabo range of mountains in Kelabit country. But there is assorted later material, parts of it collected by museum staff who also recovered specimens. The Kuala Lumpur archives also include correspondence between Tom and Ida Bagus Rata during 1970-71, on megaliths in Bali, a similar concern involving Dr. Wachtel of Cambridge during 1972-73, and megaliths on Nias.

The latest papers of the Kuala Lumpur archives were concerned with what Tom was writing about just before his death. They were drafts of papers intended for publication, but none was concerned with the uplands. One prehistoric theme focussed on Brunei Bay; another on the fossil fauna and flora of Southeast Asia.

Records of Studies Conducted in Association

An interesting early holding consists of reports by Alexander Bolang from the uplands, dated 1949. Bolang was one of Tom's oldest native associates who served the Shell Company in later years. Bolang reported in accordance with Tom's instructions from Kelabit villages on the Indonesian side of the border. This was probably independent travel which Bolang undertook because he could move more freely in border country than Tom was able to.

That body of Tom's papers which moved to Montreal compares with the Bolang material in some respects. It contains intelligence and interpretations which competent native leaders produced for Tom while talking to him or his representatives or associates about their own culture. These spokesmen responded to specific enquiries, frequently consulting one another in doing so. But Bolang's reports are of Kelabits in villages of smaller size. The reports in Montreal are predominantly of Kenyahs and Kayans, of larger and smaller villages in diverse areas. The Montreal material also begins later, about 1959, and continues later, until about 1969. Much of it stems from interviews with visiting Kenyahs and Kayans which occurred in Kuching, not in the villages of their homes.

Tom was especially interested in geographical and demographic intelligence from Kalimantan, in migrations, and in genealogies and oral traditions of descent. He assembled an extensive file on the Kenyah system of social grading and the *mamat* cult. The latter concern incorporated materials which illustrated the *mamat* rites: bark-coats and paintings which a group of visitors from Long Nawang produced. The paintings show landscapes, longhouse villages, and peoples in action during rituals, Sunday-painter style. Two of this *mamat* sequence of about twelve, which is in Montreal, remain in my personal possession.

The materials I have described were not a major concern of mine and the time they refer to is now long ago. I cannot recall more or attempt precise evaluation. I can only stress the striking magnitude of detail which Tom placed into this record, even under difficult field conditions.

He started to collect information in and about central Borneo at a time when ancient traditions were still intact or in the recent memory of leaders. He was interested in the process of modernization which went on as he continued to produce records. Because his interests were so seamless and his opportunities to gather information were so excellent, he assembled a file which became difficult to manage alongside all the other interests he maintained.

The file which now survives him in raw form may serve academic study. But it could also be of special interest to the descendants of the native leaders and elders whose memories and ideas Tom took so many pains to record.

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